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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SANTO DOMINGO 004514

SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/CAR AND WHA
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/04/2009

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [DR](#)

SUBJECT: DOMINICAN TRANSITION 11: STUDENTS PROTEST
VIOLENTLY AGAINST MEJIA

Classified By: Acting DCM Mary B. Marshall for Reason 1.5 (b) and (d).

[11.](#) (U) This is no. 11 in our series on the Dominican Republic's transition to a new administration:

STUDENTS PROTEST VIOLENTLY AGAINST MEJIA

[12.](#) (U) Police estimated that 200 students protested violently at the inauguration by President Mejia of a new central library at the Autonomous University of Santo Domingo (UASD), the nation's largest institution of higher learning, on August 3. The students said they opposed inaugurating a library that lacks books and computers. The previously announced demonstration turned violent after the ceremony, when protesters pelted the President's departing motorcade with rocks and other objects and the presidential security detail responded with warning shots. Protesters also destroyed a commemorative plaque crediting the Mejia administration with the building. There were no injuries or arrests, according to police, but vehicles were damaged. University authorities subsequently suspended a professor and seven students, expelled two more students, and threatened to prosecute a non-student participant. They closed the main campus through August 4; classes are scheduled to resume August 5.

[13.](#) (C) Embassy contacts in the Military Adjutants Corps -- which provides presidential security -- told us the President's advisers had recommended he skip the inauguration. However, Supervisor of Public Works Hernani Salazar, a close adviser to Mejia who had pushed for the library's completion, urged the President to attend. Our contacts acknowledged that the adjutants had failed to perform an advance site inspection with enough lead time to cancel the President's appearance, once the demonstrators' presence became obvious. They said some of Mejia's advisers tried to blame President-elect Fernandez's PLD for inciting the protest, but said that in fact a student federation had organized it.

[14.](#) (U) Editorials in two leading dailies denounced the student violence. News commentator Ana Mitila Lora, while agreeing with this point, attributed the disturbance to rising public irritation over widespread and extended power blackouts and the nation's other serious economic problems, and President Mejia's apparent reluctance to address them during the transition to the administration of President-elect Fernandez, scheduled to take office August 16.

[15.](#) (SBU) Comment: Sporadic protests, mostly against the electricity crisis, have occurred over the past few weeks and have provoked a few violent incidents, mostly in low income neighborhoods. The UASD protest is another symptom of the public's displeasure with the outgoing administration. However, it does not appear to signal any new trend of escalating disturbances. The upcoming inauguration, and public expectations of the new administration, should -- at least temporarily -- calm the waters. Whether the public's patience holds over the next few months remains to be seen. End comment.

[16.](#) Drafted by Bainbridge Cowell.

[17.](#) This and other reports in our election and transition series can be read on the SIPRNET at <http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/wha/santodomingo/index.cfm>, along with extensive additional material.
MARSHAL